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THE MANAGERIAL GRID AS A PREDICTOR OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION METHOD AND MANAGERIAL EFFECTIVENESS

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An increasingly applied theory of leadership effectiveness has been the "managerial grid" of Blake and Mouton (1964). Packaged as a human relations training laboratory, the "managerial grid" has been used extensively by several major industrial organizations to facilitate interpersonal effectiveness and leadership skills. The Blake and Mouton book, Corporate Excellence Through Grid Organization Development (1968), presents a summary of the theory's applications.

The "managerial grid" theory is predicated on the assumption that leadership effectiveness is based on two dimensions--"concern for production" and "concern for people." Very simply, the theory states that the optimal strategy for managers is to maximize behaviors underlying both dimensions. Thus, the Blake and Mouton human relations labs stress both organizational goal setting and group development and interaction.

Of course, the two dimensions mentioned by Blake and Mouton are hardly new additions to the leadership literature. The Ohio State University studies of the 1950's (Fleishman, 1953) posited leadership dimensions called "consideration" and "initiating structure," the definitions of which closely resemble those for "concern for people" and "concern for production." These early researchers and several others (Fiedler, 1964; Likert, 1959) have documented the complex interaction of leader behavior, situational factors and effectiveness. Despite the abundance of contrary evidence, Blake and Mouton assert that their (9,9) "team" manager (high on production and high on people) will always be the most effective type of leader regardless of

the situation and, in fact, a 9,9 orientation applied to the organization as a whole will foster a kind of "corporate Darwinism" (Blake & Mouton, 1966) in corporations.

Blake and Mouton further assert that their "team" oriented training program is capable of fostering a (9,9) "team" supervisory style in any willing participant. The effectiveness of the grid training program is said to have been demonstrated when supervisors show a shift in their attitudes from their own managerial style to the direction of the (9,9) type managers as measured by their Self-Assessment of Managerial Style (hereafter referred to as SAMS). The assumption underlying this assessment strategy is that self-evaluations are reflective of an individual's tendency to respond in certain ways to particular managerial situations. Thus, a (1,1) manager should perceive some behaviors quite differently than a (5,5) or (9,9) style manager. It is the goal of the training session, then, to change perceptions of any non- 9,9 style manager.

Despite the grandiose claims by its authors, the "grid" theory has been subjected to very little published empirical testing. Blake, Mouton, Barnes and Breiner (1964) cite changes in company profits as a function of the new "grid" training program. However, as Blum and Naylor (1968) point out, the change, could just as easily have been attributed to a changeover to automation, a change in market conditions or simply an economic upswing. The lack of appropriate controls in the study precludes the possibility of eliminating any of these alternative hypotheses. A study by Kreinik and Colarelli (1971) claiming attitudinal changes as a function of the training program is beset by similar inferential problems. A post test following the program found changes in preferences for the (9,9) grid orientation.

change that could also be attributed to any training program or even to a cursory attempt on the part of an organization to promote this type of managerial orientation.

It is not the purpose of this paper to test the effects of the Blake and Mouton training program, although such a test appears warranted. Rather, this study will investigate a measure that is typically used in grid programs to place participants on the management grid prior to and subsequent to participation in the program. This study will test the ability of the SAMS in predicting leadership effectiveness and preferred conflict resolution strategies.

Hypothesis

Based on the assumptions of Blake and Mouton, the following hypotheses were generated:

1) The SAMS should predict preferred resolution strategy. That is, the (9,9) "team" oriented supervisor should prefer the confrontation resolution strategy, the (5,5) "middle of the road" supervisor should prefer a compromise strategy and the (9,1) "task" oriented supervisor should prefer a forcing strategy. This hypothesis will be tested for two managerial levels.

2) Blake and Mouton predict a significant relationship between score on the SAMS and effectiveness ratings from subordinates and superiors. More particularly, they would predict the "team" oriented supervisor to be rated significantly higher in effectiveness than the other two oreintations. This would lend support for their two-dimensional theory of leadership and their adopted training program.

Method

Subjects

One hundred-twenty-nine employees of a large midwestern manufacturing company participated in the study. Of those receiving requests to participate,

41 out of 50 general foremen, 46 out of 55 first-line supervisors and 42 out of 73 subordinates returned usable questionnaires.

Instruments of Procedure

Each subject received a folder which was divided into three sections: The SAMS (Blake & Mouton, 1964, p. 1-4), a series of four conflict situations (described below), a list of alternative resolution strategies and a series of four effectiveness ratings. The SAMS is a measure reflecting an assessment of one's own managerial style. Participants are asked to rank paragraphs of behavioral descriptions from most to least typical of themselves and then to select from groups of statements those that best describe their own behavior. The conflict situation section consisted of four conflict situations, two inter-sender and two person-role as defined by Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snock and Rosenthal (1964). Each conflict situation was followed by a description of three behavioral strategies for dealing with the conflict. The strategies were derived from Blake and Mouton (1964) and are called "forcing," "compromise" and "confrontation." Participants were asked to rate each strategy on a seven-point scale from extremely ineffective to extremely effective in terms of that particular conflict. The conflict situations were randomly ordered across participants and strategies were randomly ordered within participants.

The four role conflict situations were critical incidents written by the first author based on his experiences with supervisors in the sample. Classification of the conflict examples into the two role conflict categories was done initially by the authors and then verified by means of a preliminary study using an 85% correct placement criterion.

The following is an example of a conflict situation and the three

strategies of dealing with it: "A job deadline is approaching that a foreman's supervisor has emphasized should be met. However, the foreman feels his men's safety may be jeopardized if work is speeded up to assure meeting the deadline. What should the foreman do?" Strategies: (Forcing) He makes what he himself feels is the appropriate decision and emphasizes that the workers have no choice but to abide by it. (Compromise) He looks for a compromise. He tries to find some sort of middle ground and attempts to please everyone. (Confrontation) He organizes a meeting of all interested parties providing them with an opportunity to work out their differences.

The Effectiveness Rating Scales consisted of five behavioral statements applied to the appropriate person and rated on a six-point scale from "never" to "always." Supervisors and foremen received all five scales while subordinates received only the "immediate supervisor," "self" and "supervisor's perceptions of you" scales.

Results

Managerial Orientation and Resolution Strategy Ratings

According to their responses on the SAMS, participants were identified as either "task," "middle of the road" or "team" management oriented. Accordingly, 11, 9 and 17 first-line supervisors and 9, 6 and 13 general foremen were classified with the three orientations respectively. Ratings on the three resolution strategies were summed across conflict types for each group of supervisors.

Table 1 presents the mean ratings on the three resolution strategies for the first-line supervisors as a function of managerial orientation.

Insert Table 1 about here

Data were analyzed by a 3 X 3 least squares mixed ANOVA with repeated measures on the strategy factor. A significant Orientation X Strategy interaction would support the first Blake and Mouton hypothesis. Table 2 presents the results of the analysis.

Insert Table 2 about here

Results did not support the Blake and Mouton hypothesis that supervisors differ in their preferences for conflict resolution strategy as a function of managerial orientation (Orientation X Strategy interaction = 1.49, df = 4, 69, n.s.).

Table 3 presents the mean ratings in the three resolution strategies for the general foremen as a function of managerial orientation.

Insert Table 3 about here

As above, data were analyzed by a 3 X 3 least squares mixed ANOVA with repeated measures on the strategy factor. Table 4 presents the results of the analysis.

Insert Table 4 about here

Results again did not support the Blake and Mouton hypothesis (Orientation X Strategy interaction = 1.09, df = 4, 51, n.s.).

As a final test on the predictability of resolution strategy ratings and managerial orientation, responses on the SAMS behavior statements were summed.

According to Blake and Mouton, the higher the score on responses to these statements, the more "team oriented" is that individual. Therefore, scores on this section of the SAMS should correlate with scores on the confrontation resolution strategy. However, no significant correlations were found in these analyses for general foremen and for first-line supervisors ($r = .13$, $df = 27$, n.s.; $r = .09$, $df = 35$, n.s.).

Managerial Oreintation and Leadership Effectiveness Ratings

A summary leadership effectiveness rating was compiled for each first-line supervisor and general foreman by summing across the five "effectiveness" statements. Table 5 presents the mean "effectiveness" ratings of first-line supervisors and general foremen from different organizational levels.

Insert Table 5 about here

Effectiveness ratings on the first-line supervisors from general foremen and subordinates as a function of ratee managerial orientation were analyzed by an ANOVA. Tables 6 and 7 present the results of these analyses.

Insert Tables 6 and 7 here

Once again, results did not confirm the hypothesis that there is a relationship between managerial orientation as defined by the SAMS and leadership effectiveness ratings of first-line supervisors from either positions above him or below him.

Effectiveness ratings on the general foremen from their participating first-line supervisors are presented in Table 5 and analyzed by an ANOVA (see Table 8).

Insert Table 8 about here

Results again did not confirm the hypothesis that for general foremen ratings of effectiveness is related to the grid position on the SAMS ($F = 1.58$, $df = 2, 23$, n.s.).

As the final test of the SAMS predictability of leadership effectiveness, responses on the behavioral statements were correlated with leadership effectiveness scores from subordinates. Blake and Mouton posit that the higher the total score on the behavioral statements, the more "team-oriented" the supervisor and therefore the higher his ratings of effectiveness. Once again, correlational analysis did not confirm this hypothesis for either general foremen or first-line supervisors ($r = .08$, $df = 22$, n.s.; $r = .14$, $df = 24$, n.s.).

Discussion

This study does not impute the null hypothesis as refutation of a method. There is still, of course, the possibility that the Self-Assessment of Managerial Style can predict conflict situational behavior or leadership effectiveness. However, what the study does illustrate is that in this rare empirical test of part of the methodology underlying the "managerial grid," results do not support the basic assumptions of the Blake and Mouton theory.

More studies with greater controls should be pursued to thoroughly investigate the Blake and Mouton theory and training programs. Unfortunately, the cart has already been put before the horse in that many industrial organizations have blindly accepted the theory and its application despite the lack of substantive data.

Though this study is not a refutation of the Blake and Mouton theory

or training program, it does accentuate the drastic need for empirical investigation before further implementation of Blake and Mouton programs. A study of the training program with control groups is recommended along with a thorough psychometric check of the instruments used in the program. Direct investigations of the two-dimensional theory of effectiveness should also be pursued with particular emphasis on the effects of different situational variables and different organizational levels in moderating this simplistic theory of leadership effectiveness. In fact, ancillary data collected in this study do much to emphasize the complex nature of the interrelationship of resolution strategies, different conflict types and effectiveness ratings.

Table 9 presents mean ratings of resolution strategies as a function

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Insert Table 9 about here

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of conflict type and organizational level. These data were analyzed in a 3 X 2 X 3 factorial design with repeated measures on the last two factors (conflict types and resolution strategies). Results of this analysis revealed a significant Level effect, Conflict effect, Strategy effect and Level X Strategy interaction. Thus, perceptions of resolution strategies differed as a function of organizational level and conflict type. Blake and Mouton might argue that such a finding is predictable given that the participants in this study have not received grid training. However, it can be argued perhaps more convincingly that those who have worked in a particular supervisory capacity for some time are better judges of what is and what is not effective resolution strategy for particular conflict situations common to them. Though the "confrontation" strategy was perceived as most effective by the three organizational

levels, the significant level effect and level X strategy effect indicates such perceptions are moderated by factors that Blake and Mouton do not consider in their theory of leadership effectiveness. In fact, the findings of the study imply that perceptions of the most efficient resolution strategy are affected by both organizational level and conflict type and that if we assume such perceptions reflect experientially tested conceptions of leadership effectiveness, then a simplistic theory of effectiveness that does not consider these factors is lacking.

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Table 1.

Mean Ratings of Resolution Strategies As A Function Of Supervisory Orientation for First-Line Supervisors

Supervisory Orientation	Strategy		
	Forcing	Compromise	Confrontation
Task	4.55	4.14	4.09
Middle	4.06	4.47	4.24
Team	4.11	4.56	4.87

Table 2.

Analysis of Variance of Ratings of Resolution Strategies As A Function of Supervisory Orientation

Source	df	MS	F
Between Ss	36	-	-
Orientation (A)	2	13.06	2.03
Error B	34	6.42	
Within Ss	75	-	
Strategy (B)	2	11.54	1.76
(A x B)	4	6.53	1.49
Error W	69	4.39	

Table 3.

Mean Ratings of Resolution Strategies As A Function of Supervisory Orientation for General Foremen

Supervisory Orientation	Resolution Strategy		
	Forcing	Compromise	Confrontation
Task	4.95	4.33	4.52
Middle	4.37	4.88	4.93
Team	4.31	4.77	5.33

Table 4.

Analysis of Variance of Rating of Resolution Strategies As A Function of Supervisory Orientation

Source	df	MS	F
Between Ss	27	-	-
Orientation (A)	2	9.59	1.36
Error B	25	7.05	
Within Ss	57	-	
Strategy (B)	2	14.81	3.07*
(A x B)	4	5.27	1.09
Error W	51	4.81	

*$p < .05$

Table 5.

Mean Effectiveness Ratings of Supervisors from Two Organizational Levels

Rating	Orientation of Ratee		
	Task	Middle	Team
Of first-line supervisors from general foremen	15.63*	13.96	13.91
Of first-line supervisors from subordinates	17.86	16.21	16.03
Of general foremen from first-line supervisors	14.92	15.38	15.16

*Note: The lower the rating, the more effective the rating.

Table 6.

Analysis of Variance of First-Line Supervisory Ratings from General Foremen As A Function of Managerial Orientation

Source	df	MS	F	P
Total	26	-		
Between gps.	2	77.50	1.93	n.s
Within gps.	24	40.08	-	

Table 7.

Analysis of Variance of First-Line Supervisory Ratings from Subordinates As A Function of Managerial Orientation

Source	df	MS	F	P
Total	20	-		
Between gps.	2	58.32	2.20	n.s
Within gps.	18	26.42		

Table 8.

Analysis of Variance of General Foremen Ratings from First-Line Supervisors As A Function of Managerial Orientation

Source	df	MS	F	P
Total	25	-	-	
Between gps.	2	51.36	1.58	n.s
Within gps.	23	32.41	-	

Table 9.

Mean Ratings of Resolution Strategies As A Function of Conflict Type and Organizational Level

Organizational Level	Resolution Strategy					
	Forcing		Compromise		Confrontation	
	Inter-Sender	Person-Role	I-S	P-R	I-S	P-R
n = 41 Supervisors	9.16	9.00	9.58	9.08	9.82	9.92
n = 46 First-Line Supervisors	8.88	8.08	8.96	8.96	8.78	8.82
n = 42 Subordinates	8.00	7.96	9.48	9.60	10.98	10.42

Note: The larger the average mean value, the more favorable the rating. Means are based on sums across two examples of each conflict type.